New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1951

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"Courtin' Time"

New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

June 14, 1951

'Courtin' Time' Woos As Fetching Musical

By WILLIAM HAWKINS

Type—Musical comedy.
Topic—Woo.
Mood—Pastoral.
I find it—Just for fun.

"Courtin' Time" is like finding clover growing on Broadway. Here is a musical that springs from the tradition that people like gentle breezy amusement with no axes to grind.

Chief of its many virtues, to my mind, is its ability to leave you with a feeling of real contentment. It is the same sort of satisfaction that came from seeing "Where's Charley?"

"Courtin' Time" tells the story of an obtuse widower whose daughters are at marrying age. To prevent his own loneliness, he gets his housekeeper to help him with a list of eligible prospects, and tries to find himself a new mate.

Wakes Up in Time.

It is no surprise to anybody when he finally wakes up just in time to win the housekeeper before she has quit him for good.

Joe E. Brown has quite recently taken over the role of the wife-minded farmer. He is likely to astonish even a lot of his fans who think of him as a fellow who makes funny faces. For he plays with all the humorous touches you expect, but beyond that with great warmth. His characterization emphasizes the appealing, youthful cockiness that is part of any honest man's make up.

On most familiar ground, with his comic bits, he is superlative in his field. The boxing pantomime, and both the brief drunk scene and longer hangover, are enormously expert classic comicry.

Billie Worth as the housekeeper sneaks up on you, just as she does on the farmer. It is a quiet, cool and most sensible performance, a sort of passive backbone of the show.

Toward the end you suddenly realize that Miss Worth is extremely handsome without trying to be flashy, and that she has sung just about every other number in the score most pleasantly. She deserves to win.

Carmen Mathews somehow has been continually associated with classics, costume or period pieces. As an inate spinster who spurns the farmer, she is giving far the best performance of her career. In a triumph of taste and judgment, she portrays a twittery belle who celebrates her one great romantic moment in nervous song and dance.

It is a grand job, so honestly done, just on the comic side of the border from is convincing neurotic of fearful nature. Last night she stopped the show as cold as I have ever seen one braked, and she will probably continue to do so.

The score is as pastoral in mood as the story, except for a trio without the wit it needs, which I could do gladly without, and a number Miss Worth is encouraged to treat so solemnly that it comes out as an anachronistic blues. Otherwise the tunes are entirely happy.

Dances Outstanding.

Ralph Alswang's production is like a lively series of quilts and prints. George Balanchine has lent his genius to a remarkable variety of dances, from the touching simplicity of a little waltz interlude, to a wonderfully intricate square dance affair done around a gazebo (summerhouse).

Between William Roos' most agreeable book, and Alfred Drake's understanding direction, "Courtin' Time" comes out as relaxing as a tall lemonade in a flirting breeze.

"COURTIN' TIME"

Musical comedy by William Roos, based on the play "The Farmer's Wife" by Eden Phillpotts; lyrics and music by Jack Lawrence and Don Walker; staged by Alfred Drake; settings by Ralph Alswang; costumes by Saul Bolasni; choreography by George Balanchine; presented by James Russo and Michael Ellis in association with Alexander H. Cohen at the National Theatre, June 13, 1951.
The cast:
Nell Rilling.....Gloria Patrice
Cathy Rilling..Gloria Hamilton
Laura.....Mary O'Fallon
George Mullins...Peter Conlow
Samuel Rilling...Joe E. Brown
Carl Stevens...Theodor Uppman
Fred Lawson..David E. Thomas
Araminta.....Billie Worth
Harriet Hearn.....Effie Afton
Mr. Hearn.....Joseph Sweeney
Theresa Tapper..Carmen Mathews
Louisa Windeatt.....
Katherine Anderson
Polly.....May Muth
Sadie.....Rosemary Kuhlmann
Millie.....Teddy Tavenner
Larry Walton.....Earl William
The Brat.....Patricia Poole

DAILY NEWS

June 14, 1951

'Courtin' Time' a Pleasant Musical For a Farmer Named Joe E. Brown

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Courtin' Time," musical which opened last evening at the National, is always an affable show and some times—using the adjective in a complimentary sense—a laughable one. It is most amusing when spinsterish Carmen Mathews goes into a pretty flutter when farmer Joe E. Brown proposes to her, and when Mr. Brown gropes his way down to get things started in his kitchen when he has an enormous hangover. It isn't Maine's answer to "Oklahoma!" but it's a nice Summer show.

Unusual Dance Numbers.

William Roos, the librettist, has taken for his plot an old English novel by Eden Philpotts, "The Farmer's Wife," and has switched it to Maine in the year 1898. The plot consists of Farmer Brown trying to marry a widowed bee-keeper, a postmaster's daughter and an old maid, when all the time he should have been courting his housekeeper. It is plain that Old Man Brown is a danged fool, for the housekeeper is Miss Billie Worth, a real handsome woman who can sing.

Some of her songs—and others' songs—are good, too. Jack Lawrence is the lyrist and Don Walker, long a gifted arranger of music-show orchestrations, is the composer. Their numbers include "The Wishbone Song," a novelty; "Smile Awhile" and "I Do, He Doesn't," on the romantic side, and "Fixin' for a Long, Cold Winter," a paean to Maine.

"Courtin' Time" is a handsome job, with some good Down East sets by Ralph Alswang—the best of which is Miss Mathew's over-elaborate garden with its gazebo and its cast iron deer—and with unusually good costumes by Saul Bolasni, whose name is new to me. Mr. Bolasni's costumes are period stuff, of course; and what I like about them is that they are colorful without being flamboyant. And the dance numbers, by George Balanchine, are splendid, being light and original and not falling into the heavy ballet type of hoofing so many musicals affect these days. For instance, at the end of the first act Mr. Balanchine has achieved a dance, "Choose Your Partner," which is an extraordinarily airy and graceful adaptation of a square dance.

Steals Some of the Show.

Joe E. Brown is welcome back in the music-show business after many, many years away from it. He's a man you just can't dislike, and he makes a good farmer, too. Miss Mathews, long known as an expert comedienne, is making her first appearance in musical comedy and she runs away with a good bit of the show with her singing and acting of "Golden Moment."

There are some very attractive youngsters in "Courtin' Time," too—Gloria Patrice and Pete Conlow as a pair of lovers who can dance and Gloria Hamilton and Earl William as another pair who can sing. Effie Afton and Katherine Anderson are of considerable help in the roles of the postmaster's daughter and the bee-keeper, and Joseph Sweeney is on hand to caricature a Maine postmaster.

"Courtin' Time," by the way, is the first production of the new 1951-1952 season. A pleasant if not too important a beginning, smoothly staged by Alfred Drake.

New York Post

June 14, 1951

By Vernon Rice

Pleasant People in 'Courtin' Time'

On the ledger's credit side of last night's new musical, "Courtin' Time," the names of Joe E. Brown, its co-star; Carmen Mathews, its featured player, and Gloria Patrice and Peter Conlow, a sprightly and talented dancing pair, should be written in bold type. So should some of the vigorous dances staged by George Balanchine.

They and the producers, James Russo, Michael Ellis and Alexander H. Cohen, work overtime to make you like the show. So does Alfred Drake, who, this time, turned from performing to directing. So does the entire company. Not for a long while have there been such hard-working troupers. TNT must flow in their veins.

So much youthful vitality and eager desire to please were expended last night on the stage of the National, that A-double-plus should be given the players for effort. If they had had their way, they would have a winning show today.

They had the burden, however, of carrying the William Roos book, based on Eden Phillpotts' "The Farmer's Wife," and the undistinguished lyrics and music by Jack Lawrence and Don Walker. This was a load for pygmies.

Calling B and H

Falling into the pattern of reminiscent Americana idyllically established by "Oklahoma!" it is to the disadvantage of "Courtin' Time" that it must be compared to the Rodgers and Hammerstein masterpiece. It is to last evening's show's disadvantage, too, that "Oklahoma!" so recently returned to triumph all over again and place it in a position demanding comparisons.

Set in the Maine of 1898, "Courtin' Time" loosely tells the story of a widower-farmer out to get a wife. After being turned down by three different prospects, he awakens to the fact that he has the ideal mate right in his kitchen, his housekeeper, whom he had been seeing but passing by for 10 years.

In such musicals as "Oklahoma!" and "Courtin' Time" it's not the story that counts. It's the method and the imagination applied. Where "Oklahoma!" is fresh and original, "Courtin' Time" is unskilled and imitative. The vitality of "Oklahoma!" is innate. The vitality of "Courtin' Time" is brought to it by its performers. For Rodgers and Hammerstein, Roos, Lawrence and Walker, in this instance, cannot be substitutes.

Any show, though, which provides a background for Joe E. Brown to clown and to turn his face into a road map, and which offers another opportunity to Carmen Mathews to display her versatility, is not without moments of glory.

New and Old Tricks

Genial Joe, back in a new vehicle on Broadway for the first time in 25 years, shows that personal tricks can be combined with a genuine and warm performance.

We have had Miss Mathews in Shakespeare, Shaw and modern comedy. As a musical comedy comedienne she stops the show and raises the question, what won't that girl do next?

It is unfair to Billie Worth, who reaches stardom in "Courtin' Time" that we all know of her long experience as understudy to and follower of Mary Martin. She is an attractive and agreeable performer and shows promise as the housekeeper, who becomes the farmer's wife, of earning the star, which has been given her. Right now, the memory of Martin is too strong.

Peter Conlow and Gloria Patrice dance and play magically together, and Gloria Hamilton, Joseph Sweeney, Earl William, Effie Afton, Theodor Uppman and Katherine Anderson are among those giving valuable and valiant support.

So many pleasant people working so hard to please. They should be allowed to win.

Journal American

June 14, 1951

A Nice Engaging Musical Comedy

By ROBERT GARLAND

At the National they don't call "Courtin' Time" a musical comedy. But you know it's a musical comedy the minute you see it. It looks, sings and acts like a musical comedy all the way through. And a mighty good one! Even the ballet is musical comedy, although kind of arty.

Even Eden Phillpotts' farmer-who-goes-after-a-wife hasn't changed much since first I saw him in 1924. Charles Coburn was he. Then known as Samuel Sweetland, he came from England's Devonshire. Mrs. Coburn was the lovely lady beneath his unlovely, unknowing and British nose.

Now, after twenty-seven years, his name is Samuel Rilling. Having turned American, he comes from Maine. The lovely lady beneath his unlovely, unknowing and non-British nose is still Araminta. Having songs to sing, she sings them. So does "Courtin' Time," with merit.

Besides Mr. Coburn as Samuel Sweetland-turned-Rilling, I've seen Lloyd Nolan, who wasn't good, and Alfred Drake, who was. And now Joe E. Brown, who's better than all the others put together. As for Araminta, Billie Worth is the best since Mrs. Coburn's songless one. She only.

All the present company follows after. All save the fancy dancers. And they're not so very highfalutin.

• • •

Pull Together

Somebody, I forget who—or is it whom?—loves the Eden Phillpotts' "The Farmer's Wife" so much that he ordered William Roos, of all people, to make a musical comedy libretto out of it. This has been accomplished, to which are added lyrics and music by Jack Lawrence and Don Walker.

But, even with lyrics and music added, the musical comedy still tells the story of the dumb but delightful toiler-of-the-soil who loves well but not too wisely. A widower, he decides to take a wife. He dresses up in his Sunday best, he washes down in his Saturday bath, to try to do so.

Nevertheless, he overlooks Araminta. There she is, a lovely lady beneath his unlovely, unknowing and all-American nose, and he goes elsewhere. He goes as elsewhere as a show, without music or with it, will permit him. It's funny to watch him go. It's funny to see him come back.

And that's all there is to "Courtin' Time" as far as story goes. It's enough. For its obvious tale goes its obvious way without undue elaboration. You know the happy ending as well as I do. You should, being it's musical comedy. But the songs, which are many, and the dances, which are few, help.

Everybody, as well as everything, pulls together. The book never gets in the way. That's why it's a good book, though obvious.

• • •

Joe E. Is Fine

Joe E. Brown is the Samuel Rilling. He is just right. A fine actor, Mr. Brown, he's also a fine comedian. Not once does he underdo his character. Not once does he overdo him. And he puts a song over nobly. I like him in musical comedy, to which, if you remember, he isn't new.

Billie Worth, of whom you've been hearing in connection with Annie Oakley, is Araminta. She's Araminta through and through. An attractive and talented young woman, she can walk and talk, sing and be herself without apparent effort. Everybody, along with me, likes her.

Then, supporting them, are Earl William as Larry Walton, Carmen Mathews as Theresa Tapper, Katherine Anderson as Louisa Windeatt and Effie Afton as Harriet Hearn. As a matter of fact, they're all good and do what they have to do whether its walking, talking, singing or merely wearing costumes.

The lyrics and the music of Jack Lawrence and Don Walker are out of a good drawer of musical comedy. You'll be hearing them, from "Fixin' for a Long, Cold Winter" up or down. Ralph Alswang's scenery is nice. Saul Bolasni's costumes are lovely. Alfred Drake's direction is skillful.

My proposal for a good evening is "Courtin' Time." It's real musical comedy, straight, simple and engaging.

The New York Times

June 14, 1951

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Since Joe E. Brown is an immensely likable clown, it would be pleasant to be able to salute "Courtin' Time" as a joyous summer lark. This is the musical play that William Roos has made out of Eden Phillpotts' "The Farmer's Wife" and for which Jack Lawrence and Don Walker have written some lyrics and music. After a difficult preliminary tour out of town it turned up cheerfully at the National last evening.

Although Mr. Roos has transposed the farmer's English wife in terms of our own state of Maine at the time of the Spanish-American War, he has made only a routine plot out of it. And the score by Mr. Lawrence and Mr. Walker is equally commonplace. Seldom has so much hard work resulted in so ordinary an evening.

* * *

With the exception of a tour of duty in "Harvey," Mr. Brown has not appeared in New York for twenty-five years. It is pleasant to have him grinning at an audience again. For he is the original stretch-mouthed mountebank with a sunny smile and an attractive personality and also a record in show-business that commends him warmly to every American.

In "Courtin' Time" he is cast as a middle-aged widower who is too fatuous to realize that the wife he really wants is the housekeeper who has been cooking his meals satisfactorily for ten years. The business of stubbornly wooing the wrong women involves a lot of amiable mugging and one very funny scene describing the horrors of a hang-over. Although Mr. Roos' plot is weak, Mr. Brown's heart is willing.

The cast also includes Billie Worth, a sparkling, black-haired young lady who plays the part of the housekeeper, sings competently and is likely to keep on making friends whenever she appears on the stage. The widower in the play is a little obtuse, but no one sitting out front need have any misgivings about her.

Carmen Mathews has one droll scene as a spinster thrilled by a proposal of marriage into a state of bird-like rapture. There are good performances also by Joseph Sweeney as a rancorous down-east Yankee and Gloria Hamilton as a first-class theatre blonde.

Since it is a rule that every musical show must have a ballet, George Balanchine has responded to the call of duty. "Courtin' Time" seems to be less susceptible to ballet than most of the recent festivals, and Mr. Balanchine's State of Maine rustic revels are curiously Russianized. Senator Brewster would be astonished if he knew and would doubtless manage to think of something hot to say. Peter Conlow and Gloria Patrice are Mr. Balanchine's principal dancers, and very skillful, too. But nothing they have to say with their feet, hands and bodies has much relation to "The Farmer's Wife" or "Courtin' Time."

In fact, no one in "Courtin' Time" has much to say. Mr. Brown's wide, hospitable grin is the most eloquent remark of the evening.

New York Herald Tribune

June 14, 1951

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY Jr.

Joe E. Does It Up Brown

THE National's new "Courtin' Time" is very lucky indeed to have secured the services of Joe E. [illegible] for the leading role of what might otherwise have been a perilous [illegible] musical. Bringing a sense of humor into a miscellaneous group of conventional happenings, Brown plays his role of a mountain farmer looking for a wife with relish and emphasis that glosses over the poorest jokes and finds a wealth of laughter in the best ones. He has superimposed his personality on a mediocre book and score combination based on the play "The Farmer's Wife" by Eden Phillpotts, making of it a pleasant summer diversion. His broad-grinned clowning is as infectious as a holiday mood, and it is good to have him back on the Broadway musical stage.

* * *

William Roos's libretto concerns a grass roots widower intent on marrying again but unable to see that the most likely mate for him is his own housekeeper. It is made up out of the horseplay among young people in love and elderly people striking attitudes, and it gives Brown every opportunity to strut his stuff and twist up his features in a bucolic satire. The book itself is never as funny as Brown's pure pantomime, and the dialogueless scene in which the star does a long act about a man with a crashing hangover trying to get a wood stove going for morning coffee is the top of the evening. His characterization is not exactly a Maine farmer, but a Joe E. Brown adaptation of one—boastful, gullible, adamant and pathetic, a wholly likeable fellow.

* * *

Billie Worth does a capable job with the leading vocal chore, in the part of the neglected housekeeper. The music by Jack Lawrence and Don Walker contains flickering melodies in a high wind of crescendoes, its happiest segment being a whimsical chorale called "The Wishbone Song." The whole production has been staged by Alfred Drake with the customary and furious enthusiasm of shows about country people, which keeps things lively but sometimes proves too much strain for the weaker spots. This is particularly true of the lyrics; they are neither as amusing nor as appealing as is pretended by the efforts of an overheated cast, and they do not stand up under the heavy selling.

* * *

Carmen Mathews does an outstanding turn as a timid spinster receiving her first proposal, outlining her reactions in a musical takeoff of romantic operetta called "Golden Moment." Gloria Hamilton, Earl William, Peter Conlow and Gloria Patrice are also prominent among the young people who sing at each other shyly or dance in expressions of rustic gladness. Ralph Alswang's sets are effective, especially a storm scene for the presentation ballet number, though the dance itself is dull. The late-coming "Courtin' Time" arrives in town at a season when light and airy musicals are a traditional item. It is only an average example of its warm-weather type, but it is blessed beyond its own means with the inimitable presence of Joe E. Brown in the comedy department.

Daily Mirror

June 14, 1951

'Courtin' Time' Musical Wins First Nighters

By ROBERT COLEMAN

James Russo, Michael Ellis and Alexander H. Cohen brought "Courtin' Time" to the National Theatre last evening, and a friendly audience wore itself out cheering the newcomer. We can only regret that this musical adaptation of Eden Phillpotts' "The Farmer's Wife" failed to arouse our enthusiasm.

It is amazing that so many well-known "names" could have collaborated on so undistinguished a song-and-dancer. Don Walker, one of our top-flight arrangers, and lyricist Jack Lawrence have done a pleasant score, several numbers from which will probably prove popular with radio and juke-box listeners.

George Balanchine, limited by Ralph Alswang's stage-filling sets, has choreographed a couple of attractive ballet sequences. The first-nighters liked particularly "Johnny and the Puckwudgies," danced very well, indeed, by Peter Conlow and Gloria Patrice. Alfred Drake has directed the book at a fast pace.

But, unfortunately, the William Roos libretto is perhaps the weakest asset of "Courtin' Time." It lacks sparkle and wit. It offers the likable Joe E. Brown few opportunities to display his comedy talents at their best. Brown is a trouper who gives everything he's got at every performance, and he has to give a lot to make very much of the role of a Maine farmer who goes looking for a wife, and then discovers that the right girl is his loyal housekeeper.

There are three excellent legit players in the cast: Carmen Mathews, Katherine Anderson and Joseph Sweeney. They make the most of mediocre material, notably Miss Mathews, who stopped the show cold with an adroit burlesque of a period romantic song.

Others meriting salutes are Billie Worth, Effie Afton.

Seldom has an audience blistered its palms more lustily than did that in the National last evening. The first-nighters gave "Courtin' Time" a rousing welcome. Bravos rang the rafters from time to time. But, as in horse racing, opinions also differ when it comes to what constitutes a click musical. And we must tab the new arrival an also-ran on our form.

"Oklahoma!"

The New York Times
May 30, 1951

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Citizens who have been deprived of their inalienable right to see "Oklahoma!" any time they want to now have nothing to complain about. For the national company, which has been touring since 1943, has settled down at the Broadway Theatre, where it opened last evening.

If "Oklahoma!" never had been staged before, it could not have had a fresher performance. You may not be familiar with the name of anyone in the cast. But that is not because any of them is untalented. Patricia Northrop's idyllic Laurey is beautifully sung and acted like a sunburst, and Ridge Bard's lanky Curly is equally engaging. Go straight through the cast and you will not find a performer who has not caught the exultation and magic of the first of the Rodgers and Hammerstein shows.

* * *

It is a good thing to see "Oklahoma!" every now and then to keep a firm hold on standards. So much has happened in and out of the theatre since it was produced in 1942 you may have forgotten just how simple and rapturous it is. Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hammerstein have done some finer work in the last nine years. Having once mastered the theatre, they have made their musical dramas considerably more eloquent. "Carousel," "South Pacific" and "The King and I" are all more mature; they have greater range and depth.

But that is only because they began so perfectly with a romantic folk-tale and some glorious music that has now become part of the common speech of America. No one can ever sing any of the exuberance and loveliness out of "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'," "The Surrey With the Fringe on the Top," "Many a New Day" and "People Will Say We're in Love." They are classics not merely because they have been sung so often. They are classics because they are romantically true.

* * *

Apparently there is no end of young singers who also can act. That seemed to be the case when the national company of "Carousel" put in an appearance in New York after a long tour; and it is certainly true of the current Oklahomans. All the boys are genial and healthy. All the girls have satin complexions and happy smiles. Since they have led clean lives, eaten nourishing food and gone to bed early every night, their energy is inexhaustible and they enjoy themselves in the flattering rhythms of Mr. Rodgers' music.

"OKLAHOMA"

Return engagement of the musical play based on Lynn Riggs' "Green Grow the Lilacs"; music by Richard Rodgers; book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein 2d; production directed by Rouben Mamoulian; dances by Agnes de Mille; scenery by Lemuel Ayers; costumes by Miles White; production reproduced by Jerome Whyte; orchestrations by Russell Bennett; produced by the Theatre Guild at the Broadway Theatre, May 29, 1951. The cast:

Aunt Eller	Mary Marlo
Curly	Ridge Bond
Laurey	Patricia Northrop
Cord Elam	Owen Martin
Fred	Warren Schmoll
Will Parker	Walter Donahue
Jess	Robert Early
Jud Fry	Henry Clarke
Ado Annie Carnes	Jacqueline Sundt
Ali Hakim	Jerry Mann
Gertie Cummings	Patricia Johnson
Kate	Judy Rawlings
Armina	Jeanne Parsons
"Child in Pig Tails"	Patricia Barker
"Girl Who Falls Down"	Audree Wilson
Andrew Carnes	Dave Mallen
"Laurey" in the Ballet	Claire Pasch
"Curly" in the Ballet	Philip Cook
"Jud" in the Ballet	Valentin Froman
Slim	John Addis
Mike	Charles Scott

The plot Lynn Riggs originally provided in "Green Grow the Lilacs" is congenial. Mr. Hammerstein's workmanship has a purity of style that is becoming; and Miss de Mille's native ballets and Mr. Mamoulian's spirited, idiomatic direction are in the perfect keys, respectively. No wonder the performance goes with such effortless grace and good humor.

* * *

If the current production is not new the management has taken pains to make it look as though it had just been built. Lemuel Ayers' wide, handsome sets with their bold masses of color and simple lines are as enchanting as ever; and so are the gay and lovely costumes Miles White designed. If there were any justice in this world, or if time went on forever, every performer in the cast would get an individual gold medal this morning. Every one deserves a special vote of thanks for preserving the lyrical innocence of a theatre work that we all have great affection for. There ought to be many a new day for such a cheering festival.

New York World-Telegram
and
The [illegible] Sun

May 31, 1951

If This Be Corn, Make the Most of It: Oklahoma's Back on Broadway!

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

No wonder it never closed! One look at "Oklahoma," back at the Broadway, and you see why it had to become a classic. It is still so fresh and strong and bright, and its score is so grand, for all the familiarity that tempts you to sing every number aloud.

The original reviews of the musical appeared on April Fool's Day in 1943. Nobody was fooled except the people who love statistics, and the ones who had refused a chance to invest in the show. "Oklahoma" has been going on its delightful way ever since, here and there. Lawrence Langner of the Theater Guild, its producer, said at the re-opening that we saw it in Scotland only a few weeks ago.

The fact that the show set several styles might have dated it, since its innovations have become requisites. But it remains pristine because it is simple, direct and strong. It moves like a sunny wind blowing ripples in a field of ripe grain.

Among Its Precedents.

"Oklahoma" was not the first show to use ballet in Broadway, but it was the show which made the dance of narrative and character, as opposed to muscular exhibition, an integral part of nine out of ten musicals.

Even more breath taking, if less discussed now, was the use of an extremely serious neurotic person, and a realistically ugly situation in a musical comedy. Previously, solemn story elements were presented so artificially, that no one expected to take them seriously.

You will remember that "Oklahoma" spins its plot around two triangles. The primary one depicts a frustrated and mentally unbalanced farm hand, lustfully intrigued by the heroine. He is an arsonist and a murderer, and lives gloomily in a smokehouse surrounded with indecent pictures.

Old Favorites Now.

He stands in the most violent contrast to the wholesome sunshiny life around him. The major and more formal ballet depicts his influence on the girl through her fear of him.

The other triangle is of course the richly funny tale of Ado Annie, the girl who "Can't Say No," and the Persian peddler, who reverses all the tricks of his trade to avoid marrying her.

It is long enough since "Oklahoma" started traveling for many things about it to hold deeply sentimental old associations. I would defy anybody not to get a tingling nose on hearing "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'" as soon as the curtain rises, and then not ten minutes later "The Surrey With the Fringe on Top."

A Star-Maker.

This was always a show more inclined to make stars than to need them in the first place. Perhaps the best news about its current presentation, is that the company is excellent. Most of these players have been touring with it for some time. Owen Martin played the full fantastic 2248 performances of the original Broadway run, and is still getting along fine.

Mary Marlo and Walter Donohue, both fine performers, have done the show over 2700 times. Jerry Mann and Henry Clarke are both in the 1100-plus class. Ridge Bond, the current Curly, and the first of them all to come from Oklahoma, has played his role over 700 times.

You can see that there is nothing casual about this company's knowledge of what it is doing.

Patricia Northrop and Jacqueline Sundt, Laurey and Ado Annie, are a pair of lovely blondes who bring their major roles all the demanded qualities set by their predecessors.

For all its talk of haystacks and interest in grain, "Oklahoma" is probably the least corny musical show you ever saw.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

May 30, 1951

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY Jr.

Still Bright, Golden

RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN'S fancy Western is back in town after a three-year absence, whoppin' it up and fittin' to bust at the Broadway Theater. With this return engagement of "Oklahoma!", the team is now represented in these parts by its beginning, its middle ("South Pacific") and, if not its end, at least its most recent wonder called "The King and I." The arrival of the road company "Oklahoma!" serves not only to throw the work of the Messrs. R & H into perspective; it also stands on its own seemingly timeless merits of melody and gayety as richly bright as its golden yellow color scheme. Well-rehearsed after its three years on the road; with production all spic and span, and with the extra enthusiasm that the company brings to a Broadway appearance, it is as near to a foolproof entertainment as may be seen in our time.

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This "Oklahoma!" is not a revival; it has been running in the hinterlands since it closed here at the St. James on May 29, 1948, and is merely stopping over here for summer audiences in a limited run. Inevitably it invites comparison with the first showing; and yet this is somewhat unfair, because memory has a way of gilding its fondest experiences out of all reality. The real and present "Oklahoma!" in comparison with the remembered one, seems to lack the sparkle of individual performing. It is rendered with competence rather than inspiration, with precision rather than virtuosity. But it is a strong vehicle not to be sent off its course by a touch of here or there. Some "Oklahomas" may be better than others, but, apparently, all are good.

Rodgers' score, now heard only every other day instead of every day, like the ones for "South Pacific" and "The King and I," has regained some of its original freshness and in any case is a delight to hear. With Patricia Northrup as Laurey, Ridge Bond as Curly and an ensemble which must know the interlocking rythms and soaring tunes better than the lines in their own palms, it is sung with as much ardor as though the singers were convinced that the audience was hearing it for the first time. This is all to the good, because second-timers will derive unexpected pleasure from numbers like "Pore Jud," "Lonely Room" or "The Farmer and the Cowman," numbers that previously stood in the shade of the ballads. The voices are not outstanding, but they are adequate, as is the comedy treatment of Ado Annie, her Persian peddler and her rustic beau.

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Hammerstein's book bubbles with optimism in an affectionate caricature of glowing young love amid a good-hearted, hardy frontier society. Its only social significance is the musical suggestion that the farmer and the cowpoke ought to be pals. Its single realistic character, Jud Fry, is a terror in this ideal setting, and he is conveniently ditched after he has served his purpose of accenting the rosiness around him. There appears to be nothing here that can age, and the irresistable patterns of love and laughter are no sign of immaturity in the first Rodgers and Hammerstein collaboration. Rather, they represent a sure sense of joyous entertainment in a general and universal form, later fined down into specific themes like realistic emotion, war or cultural differences. The latter may be more striking, but "Oklahoma!" accomplishes equally well its purpose of pure diversion. In whatever form or standard of excellence, it is here for those who couldn't get tickets before, who were too young or who can hardly wait to see it again. New York is lucky to have it back.

Daily Mirror

May 30, 1951

'Oklahoma' Is Back Home, And Gaiety Reigns

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Everything is okay again. "Oklahoma!" is back on Broadway. The Theatre Guild brought the national company of the historic Richard Rodgers-Oscar Hammerstein musical hit to the Broadway Theatre last evening for a run. It will remain there until it takes to the road next season. That is, with a little time out to permit the players a vacation.

When "Oklahoma!" preemed at the St. James Theatre some eight years ago, it marked the formation of the team of Rodgers and Hammerstein. A team that was to go on to give us such memorable successes as "Carousel." "South Pacific" and "The King and I." It not only set a new high standard for song-and-dance shows, but established a new long-run record in Manhattan, as well.

It also launched a vogue for ballet. As a result of Agnes de Mille's exciting choreography, few succeeding musicals failed to pop up with the inevitable ballet sequences. "Oklahoma!" has piled up the biggest grosses ever achieved by a musical play. Its representations have been numerous and widespread. There has been a company offering it somewhere for eight years, and the current edition is booked through 1953.

Jerome Whyte has staged, with notable pace and high spirits, the present manifestation, after the original pattern devised by Rouben Mamoulian. The Guild has kept the Lemuel Ayers sets and Miles White costumes fresh and spotless. And the cast boasts a number of attractive young players and skillful veterans.

Ridge Bond is an excellent Curly, handsome and full-voiced. Patricia Northrop, former movie starlet, is a pretty and appealing Laurey. They handle many of the delightful songs and the romance ingratiatingly. Henry Clarke is a first-rate Jud. Jacqueline Sundt a sparkling Ado Annie, and Jerry Mann an amusing Ali Hakim.

Salutes also are due Mary Marlo, Walter Donahue, Owen Martin, Claire Pasch, Philip Cook, Patricia Barker, Audree Wilson and Dave Mallen.

"Oklahoma!" is being presented at a $4.80 top, a real entertainment bargain. An enthusiastic audience packed the huge Broadway last evening to welcome back the fabulous click. The first-nighters greeted each and every number with robust applause. Incidentally, you can hear every word of dialogue and all the lyrics as clearly in the back of the big house as you can down front.

The troupe is never guilty of letting down. It's on its toes every minute of the evening. Though many of the players have given hundreds of performances, they are neither bored nor blase. They appear to be enjoying their assignments as much as when they first took them on. Gaiety reigns at the Broadway.

New York Post

May 31, 1951

By Vernon Rice

Sure, It's Great—It's 'Oklahoma!'

I hope I'm not betraying "My own, my native land" when I say that "Oklahoma!" of the Theater Guild and of Rodgers and Hammerstein is not the exact duplication, but almost, of the Oklahoma of these United States. We are a happy people, we descendants of the Osages and the Choctaws, and we have amicably solved the problem presented at the beginning of the second act in a Rodgers and Hammerstein tune and in an Agnes De Mille dance about "The Farmer and the Cowman Should be Friends."

Still, we all don't sing as lustily nor dance quite so heartily as the Oklahomans now holding forth at the Broadway.

It may be that our problems are more prosaic ones since we have moved out of the Indian territory days of the "Oklahoma!" that is the show, and we have to worry more about how we are going to pay our income taxes on our latest oil wells, and about how are we going to make Washington stop wanting to lower the price on beef.

Yet, letting modesty fall where it may, we are as rosy and pink-cheeked and ageless a crew as the musical attests, and if our males sing, they are always handsome, and do their singing in a virile baritone.

Just a Sample

As proof to that statement, I offer you Ridge Bond, whom the Theater Guild picked up in McAlester, Okla., for the Curly of this national company. A finer example of Oklahoma manhood they couldn't have found anywhere else in the state, even if Theresa Helburn and Lawrence Langner had traveled a few miles more on the Katy Railroad and arrived at Muskogee.

I can say that without prejudice, for when these guiding lights of the Guild were in Oklahoma, I was, of course, in New York.

Which came first, "Oklahoma!" the show, or Oklahoma the state, is now hard to tell, for both have been around so long that it is difficult to separate one from the other.

I'm glad that this troupe decided to pause here for the summer at the end of its eight years of traveling. For some reason or other there is a feeling that we Oklahomans don't do anything but strum our "geetars" and sing

hillbilly tunes through our noses. There on the stage is proof that we sing only Rodgers and Hammerstein songs. Why, we've been starting the day off for years with "On, What a Beautiful Mornin'."

Ever since I was a child I've been going to parties in a surrey with the fringe on the top, singing the song with the same name as Old Dobbin pulled off into the sun-bleached horizon designed by Lemuel Ayers.

They Won't Laugh Any More

People in these parts sort of smirk when I wear my bright blue trousers and my gray suede cowboy boots and a shocking-pink scarf tied around my neck. Nobody believes me when I tell them that Miles White only calls these our casual clothes. You should see what he does to us when he really dresses us up.

If you still don't believe that "Oklahoma!" is almost authentic, remember that it was adapted from "Green Grow the Lilacs," by Lynn Riggs, and he's from Oklahoma, the state, too.

I'm glad, also, that the touring "Oklahoma!" stopped off here to show you New Yorkers, who didn't see the show when it played the St. James, and to remind those of you who have forgotten, what really fine folks we have. Look at Aunt Eller, as represented by Mary Marlo; Laurey, when she is so enchantingly played by Patricia Northrop; Will Parker, enacted by Walter Donahue; Ado Annie, when somebody charming like Jacqueline Sundt has the role, and Jerry Mann's Ali Hakim, the peddler.

I'm glad to have you see what lusty, gusty fun we can have when Jerome Whyte redirects us from Rouben Mamoulian's staging.

There is Jud Fry, the villain, whom we can't overlook. I must admit Henry Clarke made him just as mean and ornery as he should have been, but, then, Jud is probably a foreigner. No doubt, from Kansas or Missouri, or could he be from Texas?

So much is "Oklahoma!" the show, like Oklahoma, the state, we're now using the title song as our state song.

Soon we'll be admitting we named the state after the show.

Journal American

May 31, 1951

Fresh as a Daisy, Gay as a Lark

By ROBERT GARLAND

Not even the first cast, which has since grown famous, had more style and substance than the cast now projecting "Oklahoma" at the Broadway. From Owen Martin, the sole surviving member of the original, to Patricia Northrop and Ridge Bond, the new Laurey and Curly, the present players are as winning as they are welcome.

And that is winning. As an old "Oklahoma" fan, I don't know when the musical version of Lynn Riggs' "Green Grow the Lilacs" has been more as it should be. The young people are young, the old people are old, the middle-aged people are middle-aged. Each acts his age with skill, ease and quite evident affection.

It is curious, but, in 1943, when "Oklahoma" was debuting at the St. James, no present-day dramatic critic was officially in evidence. From Brooks Atkinson, in Russia, to me, in the doghouse, strangers started the Oscar Hammerstein-Richard Rodgers song-and-dance version on its way. They liked it. All but one, and she's dead.

Turning to their reviews, I read "mighty sweet," "enormously pleasing," "truly delightful," "jubilant," "fresh and diverting," "enchanting to eye and ear."

* * *

But More So!

It still is. Only, if anything, more so! This resetting—and what an improvement! — of the Lynn Riggs play is such stuff as dreams are made of. It is gay for gayety, sinister for contrast. It is never dirty. And the present 'Oklahomians" are pretty much at home, for they have been pretending, and pretending out-of-town.

Mr. Hammerstein, at his best when rearranging someone else's story, is at his best in "Oklahoma." This, truly, is a play-with-music. And the lyrics are of this world as well as out of it. Line after line has come to stay, to be repeated. Not only "the sounds of the earth are like music" but "the corn is as high as an elephant's eye."

Mr. Rodgers, a different musical man since Lorenz Hart passed away, is at his best in "Oklahoma," too. All sweetness and light, even when, as in the case of Jud Fry, he's pretending not to be. "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'," "The Surrey with the Fringe on the Top," "People Will Say We're in Love" and the title song are honey.

Here's the composer welcoming the new lyric-writer, a new lyric-writer who was to go on with him to less universal things. But the sounds of the earth are like music.

* * *

Was in Play

The cast projecting "Oklahoma" has, as I have said, both style and substance. Because they haven't displayed their piece on Broadway — excepting Mr. Martin — doesn't mean that it isn't familiar to them Mr. Bond played Curly without music before he went to war. With music he has played at least 700 times.

Miss Northrop, who really is sweet, has played Laurey nearly 500 times. Jerry Mann's Ali Hakim can put 1,100 after his performances. Walter Donahue's Will Parker 2,700. Mary Marlo's Aunt Eller 2,700. Dave Mallen's Andrew Carnes 3,100. Henry Clarke's Jud Fry 1,100. Jacqueline Sundt, out of "South Pacific," has only Ado-Annied since Christmas.

Honestly, I'm glad I'm not wise enough to praise this "Oklahoma" without seeing it. So I get there early, stay there late and have as happy a time as I have had all season. The happy time takes in Rouben Mamoulian's direction Agnes de Mille's dances, Lemuel Ayers' settings, Miles White's costumes and Russell Bennett's orchestrations.

And, of course, Peter Laurini and his excellent orchestra . . . In these parlous times, "Oklahoma" is "as fresh as a daisy and as gay as a lark," just as the handbills say.

DAILY NEWS

May 30, 1951

The Best Musical, 'Oklahoma!,' Has Come Back, as Fit as It Ever Was

By JOHN CHAPMAN

When you meet a dear friend you haven't seen for five, six, seven years, it is customary and polite to burble, "Why, you haven't changed a bit!" And you may be lying in your teeth, for the old pal has developed a noticeable pot, a double chin, a stoop and gray hair. Well, I ran into "Oklahoma!" last evening at the Broadway Theatre and it hasn't changed a bit—and I'm not telling a nice fib.

This musical play, the first of the fabulous Rodgers-Hammerstein collaborations, is the champ. It holds all known records in the theatre and for all I know has also won top score in the javelin throw, the pole vault, the 100-meter dash and weight lifting. The statistics it has accumulated since it opened at the St. James—rather bashfully, too—way back when I was a boy would drive a TV baseball announcer right out of his so-called mind.

As Fresh as Ever.

By now, "Oklahoma!" should be so weighted down by statistics, so overburdened with praise and so all-fired swell-headed that it isn't worth a hoot. Instead, it is just what it has always been—the perfect musical. It is clean, funny, pretty and fresh, and its tunes and lyrics are among the best in the American theatre.

The production at the Broadway Theatre is fine—thanks, I suspect, to careful rehearsals by director Rouben Mamoulian and dance director Agnes de Mille. The company that is playing here is said to have been on the road since 1943, but I wouldn't believe it if somebody hadn't come up with a statistic. All the boys and girls look young and handsome and happy to me.

Fine Company, Fine Show.

Among the players are Ridge Bond, an ebullient and full-voiced Curly; Patricia Northrop, a pretty and saucy Laurey; Henry Clarke, as nasty a Jud Fry as ever judded; Jerry Mann, a most ingratiating peddler; Mary Morlo, a stout-hearted aunt Eller; Walter Donahue, as likable an Oklahoman as ever got as far as Kansas City, and Jacqueline Sundt, a charmingly light-minded Ado Annie. I can't say no to any of them.

And what songs there are! Also, what a book! With a start from Lynn Riggs' play, "Green Grow the Lilacs," the libretto of "Oklahoma!" is a masterpiece of clarity, brevity and pace. I'm glad this musical has come home.

"Idiot's Delight"

Daily Mirror

May 24, 1951

'Idiot's Delight' Revived At City Center

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Robert E. Sherwood's "Idiot's Delight" scored a resounding click back in 1935, with Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne impersonating a smalltime hoofer and a phony Russian glamour girl trapped in an Italian resort hotel by the advent of war. It was a prophetic war, of course, because it was not until four years later that Hitler marched into Poland and shook the world.

In addition to superbly theatrical performances by the Lunts, "Idiot's Delight" had all the novelty of a Chatauqua program, combining light entertainment with a serious message. It was like getting Swiss bell-ringers and the eloquence of William Jennings Bryan on a single bill. Over the semesters, the divertissement values have held up remarkably well, but the lecture is shot full of holes.

"Idiot's Delight" is essentially a cleverly-conceived diatribe against war and those nasty munitions makers, who were sitting targets for the leftist and liberal sharp-shooters of that era. Later, some of those munitions makers proved to be heroes, when they helped our side lick Hitler and Mussolini.

Today, some of those same munitions manufacturers are being drafted by our government to remedy our spotty and tragically neglected defenses against the onslaught of other totalitarian menace.

In the New York City Theatre Company's revival of "Idiot's Delight," which opened at the City Center last evening, Lee Tracy and Ruth Chatterton play the Lunt and Fontanne roles with skill and persuasion, if not with quite that bravura spark of their inimitable predecessors.

Others making notable contributions are Stiano Braggiotti, Emmett Rogers, Louis Borell, Stefan Schnabel, Chester Stratton, Winston Ross, and Sybil Baker. The dizzy blonde sextette is delightfully re-created by Irene Dailey, Gretchen Houser, Lillian Udvardy, Rita Barry, Joanne Woodlock, and Nancy Pearson.

"Idiot's Delight" is a fascinating reminder of how muddled was the thinking of many intelligent people in the thirties. Their hearts and their hopes dominated their logic. Sherwood is a gifted playwright, one of our best. He changed many of his opinions, something that all truly intelligent men do. The mere fact that he permitted this play to be revived proves that he is not above admitting errors.

"IDIOT'S DELIGHT"

Comedy by Robert E. Sherwood; staged by George Schaefer; settings by Eldon Elder; costumes by Emeline Roche; choreography by Ted Cappy; presented by Maurice Evans, artistic supervisor, and the New York City Theatre Company at the New York City Center, May 23, 1951. The cast:

Dumpsty	John C. Becher
Donald Navadel	Chester Stratton
Pittaluga	Rock Rogers
Auguste	Theodore Tenley
Capt. Locicero	Louis Borell
Dr. Waldersee	Stefan Schnabel
Mr. Cherry	Winston Ross
Mrs. Cherry	Sybil Baker
Harry Van	Lee Tracy
Shirley	Irene Dailey
Beulah	Gretchen Houser
Bebe	Lillian Udvardy
Francine	Rita Barry
Elaine	Joanne Woodlock
Edna	Nancy Pearson
Major	Alan Furlan
1st Officer	Dan Rubinate
2nd Officer	Scott Fielding
3rd Officer	Felice Orlandi
4th Officer	Bruce Jewell
Quillery	Emmett Rogers
Signor Rossi	John Weaver
Signora Rossi	Martine Bartlett
Anna	Sarah Marshall
Achille Weber	Stiano Braggiotti
Irene	Ruth Chatterton

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

May 24, 1951

'Idiot's Delight' a Wise Man's Folly

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The City Center has itself a first-rate attraction in the revival of "Idiot's Delight," which stars Ruth Chatterton and Lee Tracy. Here are two real authorities on what to do with a stage when you get it under your feet.

They are thoroughly happy in their roles, and they lend the barn of a theater on 55th St. an aura of exciting glamour it seldom enjoys to this extent.

The Robert Sherwood comedy, Pulitzer Prize winner in '36, stands up remarkably. Then it was a forecast, now it is a rueful glance at the past.

'Onward' Amid the Bombs.

The characters are so sound and true, and the reflection of human nature so accurate, that the play has, unfortunately for history, no feeling of belonging to another era.

This is the story, as you may remember from the Lunts' production, of a small-time vaudeville troupe stranded in the Italian Alps on the outbreak of a war. Among the other people caught there, are a honeymoon couple, a wildly passionate dreamer of a Communist and a mysterious sophisticate who travels with a famous munitions maker.

Something about the mystery woman strikes a bell with the hoofer at the head of the variety act. In the end she has confessed in a tantalizing manner to an old affair with him, and they are left alone singing "Onward Christian Soldiers" as bombs destroy the hotel.

Stimulating as Ever.

It remains a brilliantly stimulating play. Its balance of comment and entertainment is fine as is its balance of sophistication and heart. It is witty, sly and tragic, yet it always deals out a splendid kind of exhilaration.

Lee Tracy played the hoofer in the London production of the play a dozen years ago, and it is a great part for him. This is an ordinary guy without selfish ambitions, but with great regard for other people.

Mr. Tracy plays him for corny and lovable ineffectualness, making him warm and casual, yet never quite as shallow as he seems on first meeting. It is a role he has etched out sharply, then polished into deceptively moderate contours.

At Last, Chatterton.

Miss Chatterton performs as the lying woman of mystery, with more glamour and authority than any other star in the theater right now. The fascination of this appearance is likely to make you angry, as it did me, that she has acted so seldom and in such dreary vehicles for so long.

She handles a tricky and patently phony accent with fine consistency in a voice like low chimes. At one point she breaks into song, proving a clear threat to the whole "chanteuse" school.

She has cleverly dressed the tarty streak in this woman. Her hair is extreme, there are too many diamonds and too much fur, and her dress is too bright. The munitions king may tire of this dame in time, but to the hoofer she is all the special dreams rolled into one.

Miss Chatterton's deceptive calm sheaths a harpoon of intention. Her aim is deadly and her purpose is infallibly realized. This is real theatrical sorcery.

It is a good cast, particularly in the case of the blondes who travel with Tracy. Emmett Rogers makes a poignant figure of the confused political dreamer, and Stefan Schnabel is sturdy as the doctor who gives up the human race.

Louis Borell makes a clean-cut personality of the Fascist officer, and Sybil Baker and Winston Ross are extremely good in the difficult roles of the honeymooners.

The show moves with variety of pace and real values of tension and humor under George Schaefer's direction.

Journal American

May 24, 1951

Talking Is Bumbled, Play Out of Date

By ROBERT GARLAND

In titling our municipal temple of tonality and theatricals, whoever called it the City Center of Music and Drama instead of the City Center of Drama and Music, must have had this season in mind. Never, not previously, has its singing been as superior to its talking. Not even when Jose Ferrer carried on.

Where did "Idiot's Delight" come back from? And why? This Robert E. Sherwood anti-war play is as out-of-time as Aristophanes' "Lysistrata." And not as amusing. Save for the performance of Lee Tracy, it is as thoughtlessly acted as "The Taming of the Shrew" and "Dream Girl" which came before.

Those first and second, along with this third, make up the New York City Theatre Company's fourth drama season under Maurice Evans — and I quote — artistic supervision. George Schaefer staged the revival, against Eldon Elder's setting, in Emeline Roche's costumes and with Ted Cappy's choreography.

Who is responsible for the bumbled talking is not named. But it is bumbled, all except Lee Tracy's.

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A Prize Play

"Idiot's Delight" was first produced by the Theatre Guild. That was in 1936 and Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne lent it distinction, not to mention Sydney Greenstreet, Bretaigne Windust, Le Roi Operti and Francis Compton. It was at the Shubert. It was one of the season's two prize plays. The other was "Winterset."

The Pulitzer Prize-bestowers then called last night's exhibit "the most distinguished play of the year by an American author, preferably dealing with an American theme." Well, as I have hinted, that distinction must have been supplied by the performances of Mr. Lunt and Miss Fontanne. Now, it is missing.

Only occasionally — very occasionally — does any Pulitzer Prize-winning stuff come through. And that from Lee Tracy. He, co-starred with Ruth Chatterton, the distinguished novelist, plays Harry Van with honesty of purpose and clarity of diction. The others are allowed to do almost as they please.

Especially Miss Chatterton. Her diction, her dialect, are things to hear. And hearing, not to understand!

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Arguments Dated

Although "Idiot's Delight" would, I'm sure, be easier to sit through if you could understand, as well as hear, everything everybody but Lee Tracy said — especially Miss Chatterton — Robert E. Sherwood's revived anti-war play is curiously unreasonable. Its arguments are as dated as its fun.

As I remember it, Mr. Lunt and Miss Fontanne gave it a sort of toughly tender brittleness that is entirely absent — or almost entirely absent—now. Certainly Mr. Tracy, excellent actor that he is, cannot put it over alone. He tries, I think. But the times, as well as the company, are out of joint. The times and the play.

Personally, I wouldnt' be surprised if the New York Theatre Company of the New York City Center of Music and Drama, not Drama and Music, got this year's inferiority from the top. If artistic supervisors turn their artistic supervision over to their helpers, what can you expect from Tom, Dick and Carrie?

I hope you enjoy this revival of Robert E. Sherwood's "Idiot's Delight" more than I do. But I doubt it!

New York Post

May 24, 1951

By Vernon Rice

Considering 'Idiot's Delight' Today

Let's forget all about the "Idiot's Delight" of March, 1936. Let's try not to think of Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, the stars of that first production, nor of the Pulitzer Prize, nor of the Theater Guild, which brought the Robert E. Sherwood play to the Shubert.

Let's consider the "Idiot's Delight," which arrived last night as the final play of City Center's spring festival of comedy, the current stars, Lee Tracy and Ruth Chatterton, remembering that this can only be a stock production, for only two weeks are allowed for rehearsal.

Let's keep in mind the vast auditorium, which makes a grazing pasture seem intimate, and its acoustical problems, which are insolvable. Let's take a look at that mammoth stage, designed to make choral groups of 100 strong feel cozily at home.

Put them all together they don't spell "mother."

They don't even make it possible to judge adequately a play of this kind.

Anti-War and Comedy

Normally, I would say that Mr. Sherwood's play had the improper mixture of anti-war sentiments and comedy ingredients, that there might be a lot less to the work than we thought, back during the war-clouded days of 1936, and that the magic of the Lunts did slight-of-hand tricks to critical faculties.

I would say this had I not seen a summer theater production, under the direction of George Schaefer, who staged City Center's presentation, soon after UN troops had landed in Korea. I still remember the audience's hushed and frightened silence penetrating the summer air. Serious lines, which caused waves of tittering last night, were received with the sobriety of a reformed alcoholic, and accepted with the stunned solemnity of people about to view horror.

What happened, then, between the summer Schaefer production and the spring one? Rays of war are still beating down on our heads with the same white-heat intensity.

Acceptance of the current situation by the public might cause a change, perhaps, but the unsatisfactory shallowness of the play, as seen last evening at the City Center, goes deeper than that.

This being a festival of comedy, emphasis was placed on the humorous elements of the show. Good, solid legitimate laughs were played for and received, but they didn't blend with the play as a whole.

All Not Lost

Most of the comedy scenes came during the times several people were on stage, and, consequently, they were not lost in hollow air. Came the time for the thoughtful moments, and a few people were expected to carry the load.

Then, too, the stars must shoulder some of the blame. Miss Chatterton, devastatingly beautiful and handsomely gowned, played up the theatrical qualities of the phony Russian, Irene, but the actress failed to give the woman substance.

Lee Tracy, who can always be counted on for brash speed and the split-timed actions of a highly trained athlete, let the hoffing Harry Van get marooned on an island of wise-cracks, without rescuing him with subtle maneuvers. Together they were unable to do no more than introduce the play's conflicting elements to one another.

Emmett Rogers had his show-stopping moments with the well-written and moving part of Quillery, the young French Communist; Winston Ross and Sybil Baker were properly effective as the English bride and groom, Mr. and Mrs. Cherry, and steadying performances were given by Stiano Braggiotti, playing the munitions manufacturer, Louis Borell, with the role of the Italian Captain Locicero, and Chester Stratton, enacting a hotel entertainment provider.

Harry's six bouncing blonds, ranging from Irene Dailey to Nancy Pearson, were the kind gentlemen still prefer.

Eldon Elder can only be accused of designing a stock set, which filled the stage.

It might be said that the set fitted the show, but somehow, you want something more in the set and the show.